



E-FAN-04-009

June 2004

Food Stamp Program— Elderly Nutrition Demonstrations

Interim Report on Elderly Participation Patterns

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Abstract

To raise participation in the Food Stamp Program (FSP) by low-income, elderly individuals, USDA implemented the Elderly Nutrition Demonstration in six States (Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Maine, Michigan, and North Carolina) in 2002. Each of the demonstrations is organized around one of three strategies to increase participation: simplifying the eligibility requirements for elderly individuals that apply for food stamps, directly assisting them with completing the application process, or offering them the option of receiving packages of commodities each month instead of getting benefits through an electronic benefits transfer card. Preliminary analysis indicates that FSP participation by the elderly rose substantially after the demonstrations started. In Arizona, Florida, Maine, and North Carolina, participation grew significantly more in demonstration counties than in nondemonstration counties. In Connecticut and Michigan, the more modest growth rates in the demonstration counties were similar to the rates in the rest of the State. The analysis also provides some evidence that the demonstrations attract elderly individuals eligible for relatively low FSP benefits, particularly in Maine and North Carolina, where a large number of individuals eligible for a \$10 benefit are applying.

This report was prepared by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., under a cooperative assistance agreement with the Economic Research Service. The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of ERS or USDA.

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SUMMARY

The six Elderly Nutrition Demonstrations are intended to increase participation in the Food Stamp Program (FSP) among eligible elderly individuals. In this report, we examine whether there is evidence that the demonstrations are successful.

The results show that elderly FSP participation increased substantially after most of the demonstrations started. In four of the demonstration sites, elderly participation grew at double-digit rates, far exceeding the growth rates of the balance of their respective states, and leaving little doubt that the demonstrations have an impact. For each demonstration, we compare the growth in elderly FSP participation observed in each demonstration county with the growth observed in similar comparison counties in the same state. The four states with the largest demonstration-comparison site differences are Maine, North Carolina, Arizona and Florida:

- In **Maine** (application assistance model), elderly FSP participation in the demonstration site increased by 46.4 percent after 21 months of the demonstration. Elderly participation in the most-similar counties in Maine increased by only 13.5 percent, a difference of 32.9 percentage points.
- In **North Carolina** (commodity alternative benefit model), elderly FSP participation in the demonstration site increased by 35.5 percent after 12 months of the demonstration. Elderly participation in the most-similar counties in North Carolina increased by only 10.9 percent, a difference of 24.6 percentage points.
- In **Arizona** (application assistance model), elderly FSP participation in the demonstration sites increased by 47.6 percent after 15 months of the demonstration. Elderly participation in the most-similar counties in Arizona increased by 25.2 percent, a difference of 22.4 percentage points.
- In **Florida**, (simplified eligibility model), elderly FSP participation in the demonstration sites increased by 25.9 percent after 21 months of the demonstration. Elderly participation in the most-similar counties in Florida increased by only 7.0 percent, a difference of 18.9 percentage points.

More modest differences were observed in the remaining two sites: Michigan (application assistance model) and Connecticut (commodity alternative benefit model). In Michigan, growth in the demonstration site was 5.8 percentage points higher than in the comparison sites. In Connecticut, growth in the demonstration site was 1.9 percentage points higher than in the comparison sites.

The results also show that many of the demonstrations tend to attract low-benefit households to the FSP. In particular, the two states with the largest apparent participation impact (Maine and North Carolina) are attracting a large number of individuals eligible for a \$10 benefit (although substantial numbers of demonstration participants have benefits well above that figure).